

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
REMARKS TO THE MEDIA
MCCHORD AIR FORCE BASE, WA
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Secretary Perry: Good afternoon. I'd like to open with a few comments and then throw it open for questions.

I came here primarily to see this rodeo competition. This, as you know, is an exercise and a competition in the airlift, air drop, air refueling, and the ground operations associated with it.

I want to note that these operations are, to a very great extent, the key to American military power. We don't maintain this very capable military force we have because we are expecting to be in a war on this continent. We maintain it because we want to be able to project military power around the world. So it's an absolute key to any regional conflicts we may ever be involved in. It was, for example, absolutely essential to the success we had in Desert Storm. You have all read and heard about the effectiveness of our tactical air and our armored ground forces in Desert Storm, but none of that would have been possible without the Air Mobility Command and the skill of the operations that these people are demonstrating. It's also a key to our humanitarian peacekeeping operations around the world. So this is a crucially important part of our military operations.

I have to say, I was enormously impressed with what I've seen here today. The enthusiasm of the participants which is, I'm sure, evident to all of you; the pride they take in their work; and the excellence of the results of it.

I might also say that besides the honing of skills which are stimulated by the competition, there is a bonding that takes place, a camaraderie that comes here -- not only between the American crews, but between them and the international crews that are here. We have active participants here from 12 different nations and

that's a very important part of this competition. Not only their ability to learn from each other and compete against each other, but also their ability to get to know each other which happens in the margins of these competitive exercises.

With those brief opening remarks, let me throw it open for questions and comments.

Q: Mr. Secretary, you're aware of all of the events that happened at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane the last couple of days.

A: Yes.

Q: What's the Department of Defense doing about screening of people going into the services either before they get to boot camp or during boot camp to make sure that we don't have another repeat of that tragic shooting over there.

A: The first step, of course, is to assess what actually happened and what problems we can determine from that. As we do in any major accident, we have an Accident Board. That Board has been convened. Before I come to any conclusions about what the problems were and therefore, what the corrective actions are, we need to get that report. On the basis of that report we will be taking whatever corrective actions are indicated.

Q: That same response to the B-52 accident?

A: Yes.

Q: How about air shows? Have you asked for a second look at air shows and practices for air shows?

A: That may be a consequence of what comes out of this accident investigation because there are some of the same issues involved.

Q: You spoke about being able to project these forces outside of the continental United States. One of the things you've been looking at is a possible reduction in the number of C-17s you acquire in a move toward commercial derivative aircraft like the 747 freighter. Where does that stand now? Would you like to see airplanes like the 747 moved into the Air Force inventory?

A: We don't have a decision on that yet. That decision depends, among other things, on the success of the C-17 program in the next year or two. The extent to which it's able to meet its performance objectives, the extent to which it's able to meet its cost objectives. The number of C-17s we buy will depend largely on the success of the C-17 program over the next year or two. So we have a very clear plan established as to how we're going to proceed, but until we see the results of the performance on the program we won't know whether we're going to be buying a medium number of C-17s or a large number.

So the mix between C-17s and commercial derivative airplanes is yet to be determined.

Q: But you're open to the idea of commercial aircraft such as the 747.

A: Yes.

Q: You're in Boeing country, sir! (Laughter)

A: The alternative to the C-17 would be commercial or commercial-derivative airplanes. The 747 would certainly be one of the strong competitors in that case.

Q: Of course the C-141s are wearing out. Are you feeling under any pressure to get the commercial derivatives in the service just so you can get that transportation capacity in faster?

A: We'll have the C-141s in service for another 20 years, perhaps. That's not to say we're not under pressure, because it takes a long time to bring a new airplane into the service, but that is the basing item, is the life of the C-141s. We know that we have to replace those. We believe that the capacity we have in airlift now is the minimum we need for our long term needs. Therefore, as the C-141s go out of service, we have to have a new airplane coming into the service to replace it.

Q: Mr. Secretary, concerning the shootings at Fairchild, a number of Air Force psychiatrists have stated that they feel it's more responsible to keep and to treat people who come into the service with mental problems like those of the individual believed to have done the shooting. Can you address that problem? Is it better, in fact, as a matter of national policy to treat these people within the armed forces, than it is to release them into civilian life?

If so, how long do you treat them in the military forces, and under what conditions do you release them into civilian life?

A: That's a good question. I'm going to choose not to comment on that question until I've thought more about it and studied that a little more carefully.

Q: Reaction to the case of Marguerite Cammermeier?

A: A very mixed reaction. Colonel Cammermeier has performed very valuable service. There's no question about that. The issue here is not her as a person. The issue is the policy which has been established with respect to gays in the service. We believe that unit cohesion and readiness will be adversely affected unless we strictly adhere to that policy. So we are doing that in her case, and that's why we are appealing the case, the Department of Justice is appealing the case.

Q: Do you want her back on board?

A: That's going to be decided in the courts, not by me.

Q: Even though the Seattle judge is saying it would not interfere with unit cohesion?

A: The Department of Defense and the Department of Justice do not agree with Judge Zilley's interpretation.

Q: Have you met with the President on this issue? On the issue of Colonel Cammermeier and the cohesion?

A: On the cohesion issue, yes. We've discussed the principles involved here with the President many times. Not on this particular case, though.

Q: What's your assessment of "don't ask/don't tell" at this point?

A: I've never liked those words as a description of the policy. The policy, however, has been in force now for just a few months. I think it will be an effective policy. It will be tested, is being tested in the courts. Once the courts have settled the testing on it, then we'll be able to get on with it.

Q: What's the status of the nuclear posture review? It was expected out this spring, and it still has not been released.

A: It will be coming out in chunks. That is, it's not going to be one single output from the nuclear posture review. Some of the results will be coming out this summer. Others will be coming out in the fall.

Q: How will that be divided out? By service?

A: You mean the chunks of it?

Q: Yes.

A: No, by functions. By particular missions that are being performed.

Q: How about the ICBMs and the submarine-based nuclear arms? When will those be coming out?

A: I expect early this fall.

Q: Korea, North Korea. The North and the South are now going to talk. The United States and North Korea are going to have a meeting in Geneva coming up here. Do you feel that the situation is getting back... I don't think you ever considered it to be on the brink, but are you more comfortable with that situation regarding North Korea now?

A: I'm hopeful that... We were proceeding forward on two programs. One of them was to go to the United Nations for sanctions, and the other was to

reinforce our military forces in South Korea. Both of those have problems associated with them, but both of them we thought were necessary in order to cause the North Koreans to take seriously our pressure to stop this nuclear weapon program.

The talks which we're going to be embarking on next week are a very hopeful alternative to that. We would certainly prefer to settle this problem by talking than to have to take those actions. I can't forecast to you the outcome of the talks, though. If the talks turn out to be successful, that will be a very happy outcome. If they don't turn out to be successful, then we'll have to go back to where we were before, which is considering the sanctions and the force enhancements again.

Q: You answered this question about Fairchild by saying that that may be a response to the reports. He asked you about air shows. Do you mean the results of this report could be a limitation of air shows, more stringent guidelines on how you rehearse for the air shows? What did you mean by that?

A: We're getting into real speculation now on what the accident report may show. Let me separate it from the Fairchild case. But if we had any Accident Board investigation which described a deficiency in our procedures, then what we do is not just apply them to that case, but we apply them across the service. Not just this accident investigation, but any accident investigation, if it discloses a deficiency in our training or in our procedures, then we try to correct that procedure all the way across the service, and that would apply in this case as well.

Q: Is there a concern now that it may be too dangerous, considering they had a crash here five or six years ago, almost the same kind of thing, and it may not be worth it to do this kind of... Has there been some discussion about that?

A: I'm going to withhold any estimates on that until I see... These accident investigations are done very carefully and very professionally. It's always best not to rush to judgment on an accident until you see the results of the Board.

Q: How close are we to invading Haiti?

A: What we're doing in Haiti now is not invading. What we are doing is applying pressure, and very substantial pressure, on the military regime in Haiti. The pressure is to pressure them to leave and to let the elected government, elected President of Haiti, return to office.

I can't forecast what the outcome of this pressure is, but I can tell you it's a lot of pressure and it's being quite effective. So I think there's every possibility that it will work, and it will cause the military government to leave office. If that is effective, then that's all the farther we will need to go. We certainly hope that will be the case.

Q: As money gets tighter and the budgets are being cut more, are you going to see more joint ventures between the military and the local economies? Utilities and joint ventures, dual usage, that type of thing?

A: I don't think I can give you the exact number, but we have more than a billion dollars a year in dual use technology programs in the Defense Department. The purpose of that is to sponsor technological developments that are useful both to the military and civilian purposes so the country benefits in two different ways. We benefit in defense, though, because we form joint ventures and it not only brings in the skills of people outside the defense industry, but it also brings in resources from them.

Q: Based on what you know about Fairchild, do you believe that was a hot-dogging situation, or that something went wrong?

A: No comment on that.

Thank you very much.

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